

The Destruction of Neuroradiology and Interventional Neuroradiology at the University Hospital, Uppsala, Sweden

G. GÁL, M. TOVI, M. LEE

Formerly appointed at Department of Radiology Uppsala, Sweden

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Background

Neuroradiology has existed in Uppsala since the mid 1960s to serve the Departments of Neurosurgery and Neurology that were established in 1963. Neuroradiology was from the beginning a section within the Department of Radiology, with the first professor of neuroradiology appointed in 1987. In 2001 the Department of Neuroradiology was set up but was still a part of the Department of Radiology.

Besides conventional neuroradiology and pediatric neuroradiology, interventional neuroradiology was added in 1996, with round-the-clock service performed by two specialists (GG and MT). The number of aneurysms treated during the last five years has amounted to more than 100/year. Additionally ca 100 neurointerventional procedures were performed annually. Besides serving the inhabitants of Uppsala county, we have also supported 25 hospitals in six counties, altogether ca. two million people. In 2006 we performed 8500 MR and CT examinations and 250 interventional procedures. Additionally we reported or demonstrated 10,000 examinations from other hospitals to our clinicians in daily rounds.

This work has been done by only three senior neuroradiologists, since it has been extremely difficult to recruit new colleagues, due to the combination of high workload and low salaries. Several colleagues have also left the department for these reasons.

Neuroradiology could, against all odds, survive in Uppsala due to the following factors:

1. Excellent cooperation between devoted doctors and enthusiastic personnel within the department.
2. Positive feedback from clinicians, and especially strong support from the Chairman of Neurosurgery, who – unfortunately – left the hospital in August 2006.

In April 2007 the Chairman of Radiology proposed a new organization for the whole department: starting in September 2007, the former organ-oriented work was to be changed to work oriented to modalities (CT, MR, angiography, etc.) The reasons for this reorganization were strictly financial, with the aim of “more efficient use of equipment”. For neuroradiology as a speciality this meant eradication.

After discussions within the Department of Neuroradiology, we formulated a report on the negative consequences of this new organization for our patients, our clinicians and for the hospital. This report was sent to the Chairman of Radiology and to the director of the hospital. The report was met with complete silence. Our sincere worries for our patients, clinicians and the hospital were totally ignored. Since we were refused permission to discuss the situation with the Chairman of the department or the hospital management and since we considered that we could not function as neuroradiologists in this new organization, all of the working neuroradiologists in Uppsala resigned on

31st May 2007 to make the hospital management aware of the seriousness of the situation.

The day following the resignations, the Chairman of Radiology violently fired our chief (MT) forbidding him to re-enter the department. This was done to frighten us, the remaining two neuroradiologists but to no avail...! We refused to work under such circumstances. The chairman now had to recruit other neuroradiologists, so he first tried in Scandinavia, later in the whole of Europe, with no success... All neuroradiological activities stopped in Uppsala. We published an article in the local newspaper to inform the public about the situation in the hospital. We also informed those European colleagues that we could reach by phone, e-mail, or personally during the LIN-NC. We were very happy with your response, and we want to thank all our colleagues who refused to help the Chairman, for the strong solidarity you have shown, although the Chairman offered you salaries that were four times higher than ours!

The Board of the Swedish Society of Neuroradiology and the President of the ESNR condemned the actions taken by the Chairman, but the hospital management still support him, to show that doctors should not oppose their chief...!

The key point for the hospital was neurointervention. The only remaining interventionist (GG) refused to work, unless the chief was re-employed.

Finally, in mid August, the chairman found a traitor abroad, who did not respect the solidarity, and signed up for work. We have helped this colleague extensively before, he used to be our friend, and was fully informed about the situation in Uppsala, but chose to support the Chairman (for the salary he offered?), who literally destroyed our Department of Neuroradiology!

Epilogue

We consider this development a disaster, not only for the individuals involved but also for neuroradiology and interventional neuroradiology. The Chairman and his supporters in the hospital management are still in power, although the whole department has serious problems, especially financially but also lacking radiologists and neuroradiologists.

Due to the aforementioned circumstances, we would like to advise all neuroradiologists not to support the Chairman/hospital management with working power.

We, the undersigned neuroradiologists, former employees of the Department of Neuroradiology, Akademiska sjukhuset, Uppsala, Sweden, would like to thank the Chief Editor for the opportunity to publish this letter, aimed to inform you about a severe conflict between us, the working neuroradiologists, and the Chairman of the Department of Radiology, Uppsala, 27th February 2008.